United Nations

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General expresses concern over situation of 420,000 refugees and displaced persons in Yugoslavia.

- Secretary-General warns that failure to mobilize adequate development resources could set back emerging spirit of democracy and enterprise.

- International Committee of the Red Cross urges parties in Yugoslav conflict to designate high-level representatives for meeting in Geneva on humanitarian problems affecting that country.

- Administrative and Budgetary Committee told of "inequities" and "distortions" in current scale of assessments in debate on system of financing regular United Nations budget; approves budget appropriations for three humanitarian agencies and public information activities.

- Director-General of Food and Agriculture Organization warns of "extremely risky situation" in Eastern Europe; sees agriculture in developing countries in "immense distress".

- Political and Security Committee approves a number of drafts on nuclear disarmament -- one calls for nuclear-weapons-free zone in South Asia.

- Convention on Rights of Child receives 100th ratification.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar said today that he was concerned about the situation of an estimated 420,000 refugees and displaced persons in Yugoslavia. He said he was expecting to get information soon from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Mrs. Sadako Ogata, who, he said, is following the situation closely in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

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Asked by correspondents this morning whether anything new had come out of his meeting yesterday with his Personal Envoy, Mr. Cyprus Vance, who has just returned from a mission to Yugoslavia, the Secretary-General said they had assessed the situation in that country. He said that after the Rome Declaration of 8 November, in which the 12 Member States of the European Community called on the Security Council to impose an oil embargo on Yugoslavia and to make the arms embargo more effective, it was now up to the Europeans to decide what their next step would be.

Asked about a letter from a Serbian official requesting United Nations peace-keepers in the area, the Secretary-General said the validity of the letter had been questioned. The letter was addressed to the Security Council President and it was his decision whether the letter should be considered as having official validity.

The Secretary-General also commented on the upcoming election of the new Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Asked if time was running out for a "smooth transition" between the present and the upcoming administrations, the Secretary-General, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar,replied that he was pleased that Security Council Members had made progress in their deliberations yesterday and that he hoped they would continue today. He needed time to show his successor all the problems that were still pending -- "and there are quite a lot", the Secretary-General said.

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The Secretary-General has warned that failure to mobilize development resources could set back for decades the emerging spirit of democracy, cooperation and enterprise.

Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar was addressing the General Assembly's Second Committee (Economical and Financial) yesterday on his proposal to convene an international conference on development financing.

He stated that he feared that in the absence of adequate resources to finance an enlarged global investment agenda, growth might by stifled, development might become more difficult if not impossible, and "a relapse into authoritarian forms of Government" might result.

He said there were two fundamental requirements for the success of efforts presently being carried out by developing countries and those trying to integrate into the world economy: increased trade and access to adequate financing. Economic reform in developing countries and in the economies in transition would only lead to sustained growth if public and private investment grew significantly above present levels. An effective and sustainable solution to the debt problem of indebted nations was also imperative, he said.

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During its meeting yesterday, the Committee also heard the introduction of three draft resolutions on special economic assistance to Lebanon, Chad and Central America, respectively.

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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has requested a high-level meeting of the parties engaged in the Yugoslav conflict to work out "speedy, practical and viable solutions to the grave humanitarian problems affecting the country".

The Committee said in a press release issued today that the new initiative was prompted by the constant and rapid deterioration of the situation in Yugoslavia. The situation of civilian populations had deteriorated sharply in the last few hours, the Committee said, particularly in Dubrovnik, with casualty figures mounting as fighting and shelling was continuing unabated. ICRC delegates on the spot had reported that it was impossible for local first-aiders to evacuate the wounded and bring help to civilians, as required by the most basic rules of humanitarian law.

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The formula for assessing Members' contributions to the United Nations budget was evolving in a way that seemed to bear no relationship to each Member State's capacity to pay, and a growing financial burden was being placed on developing countries, the representative of Mexico, Jorge Montaño, told the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary), yesterday. Other delegates said the methodology used to arrive at the scale was too complicated and included distorting elements.

The Representative of Japan, Katsumi Sezaki, said his Government had received criticism at home over the widening gap between the increasingly heavy financial responsibility Japan had to bear and its decision-making power, position and representation within the Organization. Also, the total financial burden of the five permanent members of the Security Council had decreased, he said, while their decision-making power seemed to have increased.

Also yesterday, the Committee approved resources totalling over $168 million for three humanitarian agencies and public information activities, as it continued its section-by-section reading of the proposed programme budget for 1992-1993.

Taken separately, the funds amounted to some $42 million for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over $20 million for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), almost $8 million for the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) and almost $100 million for the Department of Public Information (DPI).

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Calling the situation in Eastern Europe "extremely risky", the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Edouard Saouma, has warned that "major injections of capital and technology" are needed to avert the collapse of agriculture throughout the region.

In a keynote statement to the FAO Governing Conference, which opened over the weekend in Rome, Mr. Saouma said that, as the world economy became increasingly interdependent, agriculture in developing countries faced "immense distress". The FAO had estimated that overall food and agriculture production would fall by 0.3 per cent below the 1990 level for the first global decline since 1983, and it predicted a 9 per cent drop in Soviet crops and livestock.

During the three weeks of deliberations, Ministers of Agriculture and senior officials from 157 member nations of the FAO will review the state of food and agriculture in the world, including the situation in Eastern Europe.

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The General Assembly's First Committee (Political and Security) yesterday voted on four draft resolutions on nuclear disarmament, as well as a draft on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South Asia. The Committee also approved, without a vote, draft resolutions on a proposed chemical weapons convention.

Among those addressing the Committee, the representative of India, Prakash Shah, said his country had always maintained that nuclear disarmament was a global issue and not a regional one, and solutions could not be partial, but global. Further, he said, the success of any regional disarmament effort depended on prior consultations with concerned States of the region. The text served no disarmament purpose and he would vote against the draft, he said.

Among other drafts approved by the Committee, one, adopted by a vote of 127 in favour to 2 against (France, United States), and four abstentions (China, Israel, Marshall Islands, United Kingdom), would have the Assembly urge the early discontinuance of all nuclear-test explosions "for all time" and reaffirm the necessity of a comprehensive nuclear test-ban treaty. Other texts approved concerned a comprehensive nuclear arms freeze and an international convention prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances.

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The Convention on the Rights of the Child received its 100th ratification on October 21, according to a joint statement issued today by Jan Martenson, Under-Secretary-General for Human Rights, and James P. Grant, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Adopted by the General Assembly in 1989, the Convention was also signed by a further 41 countries, which were in the process of considering ratification, thereby making its standards part of their national

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legislation. "Such rapid response from Governments is unprecedented in the history of human rights law", the two United Nations Officials noted. The statement went to say that the rapidly growing momentum created by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit for Children was an encouraging sign that the world was now ready to act vigorously to make a difference for children.

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